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Dayna R Robison 09/20/2006 11:17:53 AM From DB/Inbox: Dayna R Robison

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VIENNA 002635

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR YVETTE SAINT-ANDRE

OSD FOR COMMANDER CHAFFEE

WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: September 05, 2006

SPOe and LIF Join Forces

11. The Social Democrats (SPOe) have entered an "election alliance" with the Liberal Forum (LIF) by providing the party one space for a parliamentary seat on their federal ballot list in an effort to broaden the Social Democrat's overall appeal to voters in the upcoming general election. SPOe leader Alfred Gusenbauer said he hoped the move would show that "the SPOe is a very broad movement which can also be attractive to liberal voters." The decision has created a rift within the Liberal Forum, with some members leaving the party over what they call a "critical move." According to Gusenbauer, the move is aimed at preventing formation of yet another coalition between the People's Party (OeVP) and the Alliance for Austria's Future (BZOe), as well as guaranteeing parliamentary representation for those who support the LIF's political platform. LIF leader Alexander Zach explained that the "olive tree alliance" of Italian premier Romano Prodi served as a model for the collaborative scheme. Semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung quotes Austrian political analyst Peter Filzmaier as saying he considers the move risky. He believes that, although they could attract some new voters, the SPOe could also lose votes to the Greens as a result of joining forces with an economically liberal party. Others, such as Wolfgang Bachmayer of the OGM market research institute and Guenther Ogris of the SORA research group, think the new strategy is a positive step. According to Bachmayer, the move may have a "psychological effect," signaling that the SPOe has become stronger and more modern. Ogris said he believes the SPV can only stand to gain and only a small number of voters will be put off by the move.

Home Care Personnel Soon Legal

12. Economics Minister Martin Bartenstein (OeVP) presented draft legislation on Monday which would allow foreign home care personnel - those who care for the sick and elderly -- to work legally in Austria by eliminating the seven-year transition period required for private personnel from other EU countries. Semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung reports that Bartenstein's draft proposal will go through a four-week review process. Revision will therefore continue after the general election October 1. However, the Minister is optimistic the new law can enter into force on November 1. The OeVP's junior coalition partner BZOe, however, says it opposes the move.

EU to Create Immigration Commissioner?

13. The European Commission is reported to be considering creating a new position to deal with immigration. Sources in Brussels say the post of Immigration Commissioner could be created when Bulgaria and Romania join the EU in 2008. There is growing pressure on the EU to take action on immigration, as thousands of illegal immigrants are arriving by sea from Africa. In mass-circulation daily Kurier, Brussels correspondent Margarethe Kopeinig suggests the EU needs to solve the problem of refugees from Africa "for reasons of self-interest, and not because of compassion." The EU leaders are well aware that illegal immigrants "won't be stopped by laws or walls." However, they have "so far failed to muster the courage to come up with a clear immigration concept." All this, despite the fact that - according to Kopeinig - it "does not require any lofty moral standards to do so; cool rationality would already go a long way" toward finding a solution. "From an intellectual point of view, we know that something has to happen in Europe's backyard to prevent people from fleeing their countries," she says, suggesting "better perspectives, money and food. Even more wretched conditions in Africa will not make Europe safer. Even the populists know that. If Europe does not want to import instability, insecurity and terrorism, it will have to stem the flow of immigrants in cooperation with Africa. Helping them to help themselves does not seem to be such a bad strategy."

Operation Medusa

14. More and more often, NATO forces stationed in Afghanistan need to carry out large-scale operations against Taliban troops. Currently, "Operation Medusa" is aimed at driving out of the south and east of the country those Islamists who came in from Pakistan and are

controlling large parts of Kandahar province. Although NATO claims many Islamist fighters are killed in such operations, terrorists have repeatedly managed to get as far as Kabul. Meanwhile, the record poppy harvest is also strengthening the Taliban. Chief editor Viktor Hermann suggests in independent provincial daily "Salzburger Nachrichten" that Afghanistan is "failing again." He comments: "Afghanistan is on its way back to being a 'failed state.' (...) Initially, the efforts at depriving terrorists of their home base by driving out the Taliban regime seemed to work. But the US and its allies made the same mistake in Afghanistan as they did later in Iraq: Too few troops, too little money, no sensible concept for building up new government structure in the country. (...) What we're dealing with here is not some 'unfortunate operation,' but a hopelessly wrong concept. (...) Bit by bit the Taliban are wresting the country back from the government in Kabul and its western allies."

Iran Talks in Vienna

15. The European Union's foreign policy chief Javier Solana and Iran's top nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani are expected to meet in Vienna tomorrow for talks on Iran's nuclear program. The meeting, which has not been officially confirmed, is likely to be the last opportunity to avoid a new push for sanctions against Iran at the UN Security Council. Foreign affairs writer for liberal daily "Der Standard" Michael Moravec comments on the Iranian nuclear conflict: "With its Security Council resolution, the UN obliged Iran by international law to suspend its nuclear program. The deadline passed, and nothing happened. (...) The international community's inability to solve the problem is likely to end disastrously. According to the foreign minister of one major EU country, Iran is headed straight for the atomic bomb. There is no other way to explain Tehran's blathering. (...) An Iran which supports Hezbollah and Hamas, and is in possession of nuclear weapons, is a global policy nightmare that should frighten even China and Russia. But for those two countries economic advantages seem to count more."

McCaw